

THE SPENARDIAN



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THE
SPENARDIAN

The Spenardian is a quarterly hyperlocal magazine for the neighborhood of Spenard. In addition to the current events and news of Spenard, The Spenardian features stories about food, culture, arts and entertainment, history and profiles of the neighborhood's businesses and inhabitants.



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Victoria Petersen is an Anchorage-based freelance writer. She lives less than 100 feet outside the Spenard Community Council borders, but don't tell her she's not Spenardian. She's been called the Empress of Spenard on more than one occasion. Her great-grandparents homesteaded in Spenard, and her parents met at the world famous Chilkoot Charlie's.

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BEYOND THIS PAGE

- 4 IN THE BEGINNING
- 6 FROM CRACK HOUSE TO BEAUTY SALON
- 9 BIKES CONNECT THE SPENARD COMMUNITY
- 10 SHOOK IN SPENARD
- 12 PRODUCTIVE PESTS CLEAN TAXIDERMY AT ALASKA BEETLE FARM
- 15 FIRSTS AND LASTS IN SPENARD
- 16 SPENARD SNAPSHOT
- 18 PALACE OF RUGS BRINGS THE WORLD TO SPENARD
- 22 GHOSTS OF SPENARD
- 25 A SPENARD HAIKU
- 26 SPENARD'S FIRST NEIGHBORHOOD GARDEN
- 28 JESSICA'S CHEESY CRACKER-CRUSTED HALIBUT
- 30 FIVE PLACES TO GET A QUICK BITE TO EAT IN SPENARD
- 32 HOW A ROAD PROJECT CATALYZED A NEIGHBORHOOD MOVEMENT
- 34 FACES OF SPENARD: DAVID
- 36 GRANNY B'S COMMEMORATES A GRANDMOTHER'S LEGACY
- 38 BACK IN MY DAY...

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In the beginning

We see his name everywhere. Joe Spenard made quite a name for himself in Alaska, despite living here for only a decade.

Originally from Ottawa, Canada, Spenard came to Alaska in 1909, where he would serve as the vice president of the Alaska Securities company. The City Express, Spenard's transfer and taxi service was born in Valdez and moved to Anchorage, along with Spenard and his wife, in 1916.

In Anchorage, Spenard used two vehicles for the City Express, an REO truck that was used to haul wood and a Ford that he would use to pick up passengers in. These two cars were some of the first motor vehicles in Anchorage. Spenard's bright yellow car grabbed attention and so did his marketing plan. The City Express service slogan was "Time and Tide will Not Wait, But City Express Is Never Late." He was also known for running unique ads in the newspaper. "Of all the cars both big and small, the yellow car just beats them all. Complete satisfaction, nothing less. Is given by the City Express," was an ad featured in the Anchorage Daily Times, June 26, 1916.

Spenard was often seen with a cigar stub hanging out of his mouth, topped with his uniform cap that read "express" above the bill. He was also known for his yellow suit and matching cap that he would wear as a way to promote the City Express.

Spenard had other business ventures in mind. He wanted to get into the lumber business and found an

opportunity when he decided to build on the shores of Jeter Lake, which he then named after himself. Combined, Lake Spenard and Lake Hood are the busiest seaplane base in the world.

In August of 1916, Spenard built a dance hall. Large portions of land were cleared along the lake to make way for the building of the dance hall, which was all illegal activity considering the area Spenard was building in was part of the Chugach National Forest. Despite warnings from forest rangers, Spenard went on to create a popular recreations spot. Along with help from the Bill's Club, the predecessor of the Elks Club, Spenard built an access road to his dance hall that reached the end of the city Anchorage at Ninth Avenue and L Street. The road and Spenard would become infamous with bootlegging and good times.

In May of 1917, Spenard's property, his dance hall and his home were destroyed in a fire. That same year, he broke his leg and a worsening heart condition made it difficult for him to operate the City Express. Four months later, he sold his yellow car and him and his wife moved to California for good.

Joe Spenard died in Sacramento, California on Aug. 8, 1934, and is buried in Masonic Lawn Cemetery next to his wife.

*Words by Victoria Petersen
Photo by Sam Davenport*





Diamond in the rough: From crack house to beauty salon

Dawn Dolphin-Wroblewski wanted diamonds for her birthday. Instead, her husband bought her a derelict building, that was once a haven for drugs, prostitution and crime.

“It was pretty nasty when he bought it, so I was not real happy. I asked for diamonds and this is what I got.” Dolphin-Wroblewski said.

In 1998, her husband purchased the building. It took six months to gut and clean the property, and another six to prepare the Blue Dolphin Salon before opening.

“This place was littered. There was bullet holes across the back wall. It was pretty crazy,” Dolphin-Wroblewski said.

After a year of cleaning and renovations, the salon opened its doors to Spenard in September of 1999. The salon is full-service, complete with tanning services, esthetician work, a nail technician and three hairdressers, including Dolphin-Wroblewski herself and her daughter. Also at the salon is Roxy, Dolphin-Wroblewski’s pet pig that follows her everywhere she goes.

The former crack house at 3829 Spenard Road had people living in all corners of the property. From tiny cubbies built in the ground floors, to ramshackle huts set up around the building, Dolphin-Wroblewski says at one point there were around 35 people living on the property.

“The cops were getting called here a lot... They actually condemned the building. It wasn’t because the structure was unsafe, it was because the cops were getting called here so many times,” Dolphin-Wroblewski said. “They were renting cubbies out that could barely fit a twin size bed... people were even living [downstairs] with wires hanging down.”



The unsavory history of the building goes beyond the crack house. The building was also home to the Glass Slipper, a 24-hour massage parlor, one of many that lived on Spenard Road in the mid-1900s.

Dolphin-Wroblewski has been doing hair for over 35 years. Blue Dolphin Salon began in Midtown off Northern Lights Boulevard, but with the location on such a busy road and less than adequate parking available, Dolphin-Wroblewski said she wanted to find a better place for her salon. She says that about 50 percent of her clientele walk to the salon from around the neighborhood.

“I like [Spenard] better. I like the people. There’s good people in [Midtown] too, but it’s a lot more neighborhood-orientated, where over there it’s more business orientated,” Dolphin-Wroblewski said.

The salon is located at 3829 Spenard Road and is open 10 a.m. - 6 p.m., Monday - Saturday.

*Words by Victoria Petersen
Photos by Young Kim*





BIKES CONNECT THE SPENARD COMMUNITY

Spenard is a hub for biking culture. There are a plethora of cycle shops that have settled into the neighborhood, including The Bicycle Shop, Speedway Cycles and Fatback Bikes, but more continue to flock to the area.

Many residents who live in the neighborhood live close to good food and local businesses, which makes traveling on two wheels oftentimes a healthier and more eco-friendly alternative to driving a car.

Cary Shiflea is the owner of Alaska eBike, an electric bike shop in Spenard. The business used to be located in Midtown before relocating to Spenard. He saw the Spenard Road project as a great reason to move into the neighborhood.

“From the very start, I wanted to put my business, Alaska eBike, in Spenard,” Shiflea said. “It seems like the community really understands that you can get a lot done by walking or biking rather than getting in your car.”

Other bike shops in the neighborhood have been really welcoming, Shiflea says.

“Anchorage overall is just, the community that comes together... Once you’ve [ridden] a bike once on the trails, you’re sort of a member of that community,” Shiflea said.

Lindsey Hajduk has been involved with Bike Anchorage, the city’s largest bicycle advocacy

organization, for five years as a volunteer and treasurer. As a resident of Spenard herself, she believes that bike culture has really bloomed the last several years, especially with winter riding.

Hajduk says the need for safer streets has increased over time. It’s been a primary focus of Mayor Ethan Berkowitz and his administration to work towards reducing all major injuries and deaths in traffic collisions and fatalities. In 2016, the mayor launched Vision Zero, an Anchorage initiative to eliminating traffic deaths for all road users. The initiative added improvements, including the Spenard Road project. The plan looks at designing roads for everyone, including pedestrians, people who ride the bus, and those who travel on bikes or in cars.

A lot of the work Hajduk does with Bike Anchorage is connecting with businesses in town to support a more bikeable city.

“People identify as bike commuters, so it isn’t just that people bike a lot for exercise or for recreation, but that they also bike because they want to be able to get to Bear Tooth on their bikes, or they want to be safe along the roadways because we’re such a connected community,” Hajduk said.

*Words by Sam Davenport
Photo by Young Kim*

SHOOK IN SPENARD

54 years ago, Sylvia Butcher was enjoying an after dinner coffee with her husband, David Butcher, when the earth began to tremble and shake. The couple dashed out of their newly built Spenard apartment, running for their lives.

The Good Friday earthquake in 1964 was a 9.2 on the Richter scale, the largest earthquake ever recorded in North America and the second largest earthquake ever recorded in the world. Striking at 5:36 p.m. March 27, 1964, the quake lasted for approximately four and a half minutes.

Sylvia Butcher was pregnant and weeks from her due date when the earthquake occurred.

The apartment they lived in was partially damaged from the quake. The building was leaning over. Even one of the most structurally sound parts of the building, the door frame, was so off-kilter that the Butchers couldn't shut their door. The building, which has since been renovated still stands today on W. 25th Avenue.

*Words by Victoria Petersen
Photo by Young Kim*

“So we were just finishing dinner, we just had poured our coffee, and the earthquake started. And, the both of us — my husband and I — we had both been in earthquakes before, because we're both from the west coast. But this was a gigantic jolt and it just kept jolting and it was not only rocking, it was heaving and rolling. And the noise of it was so tremendously loud.

So we opened the door and started out, but the concrete stairs kept going in and out, and the trees would hit the ground and straighten and the cars that were parked up against our windows were bouncing. The powerlines were going way, way down to the ground and stiffening. All the trees were going back and forth and the ground was opening and closing. It was like, you had never seen anything like that before in your life. And it looks like, you know, you couldn't really trust what your eyes were seeing.

Right as we were trying to walk up those stairs that were moving, we decided it was not a good idea so we ran back inside the apartment. The door — it had shifted, so we couldn't close the door and all the — all of the doors had popped out, the tv was on its face, all of my dishes went flying through the air in the kitchen. Those had

been my wedding present, and I had lost almost every one of my dishes.

We thought maybe Russia dropped a bomb on us, but then that wouldn't last so long. Then we thought maybe, maybe we were going off — the earth was going off its axis, because it lasted more than four minutes and again, it didn't seem like there wasn't going to be an end to it.

And now I realize if I — going through the earthquake has left me different than I would have been and if I hadn't had gone through it. I'm really sensitive to the noise if an earthquake comes, I can hear it. And I can also feel buildings flex, you know the — buildings flex. It comes back to mind every time. It really was something that was like — I hope it's only once in my lifetime. It was just a real roaring sound that filled your whole head. It sounded like, maybe you're on the railroad tracks with the train going over, and you were just right there and it stayed that way. You can't believe the sound that it was. It was like no sound I had ever heard.

Everytime I go in a building, I always locate the stairs. Always. I don't think I would do that if I hadn't had been — hadn't been through that.”





PRODUCTIVE PESTS CLEAN TAXIDERMY AT ALASKA BEETLE FARM

The Alaska Beetle Farm is an operation run by Max Walton and his 100,000 dermestid beetles.

Two freezers that were severed in half and sealed together operate as his makeshift beetle tank in his garage, which doubles as his workspace.

Chunks of styrofoam lie in the tank for the beetles to burrow into and pupate. Skulls from different animals fill the container, some with horns and some without. Skulls sit scattered around the garage; a musk ox here, a fox there. A rotting moose skull lays on the ground with maggots eating the meat left on the bone.

Walton has been officially operating the Alaska Beetle Farm for about a year. Two and a half years ago, Walton purchased his first beetles online out of curiosity for his girlfriend, who creates jewelry out of bones that she buys online. She thought that finding a roadkill and using the beetles to clean them as an alternative was a great idea.

“I ordered a really small package of them off of the internet, and we started with a fox that I had gotten on the road up north. We worked up the colony to where friends of mine were asking to clean bears for them or whatnot,” Walton said.





Walton grew up in Kasilof but has lived in Spenard for several years. He is self-taught in taxidermy with beetles, but has learned from forums online and taxidermist friends. There's a business in Kenai and one in Fairbanks that uses beetles to clean bone, but Walton runs the only beetle farm in Anchorage.

Walton has a day job as an oversized pilot truck driver, but his taxidermy work has picked up so much over the last year that he will be adding a second beetle tank to his operation.

People drop off bears, moose, wolverines, caribou, foxes, goats and wolves, to name a few. Walton has customers ship skulls to him, and most recently finished cleaning a wild boar skull from Hawaii. He has even had customers drop off their dead pets.

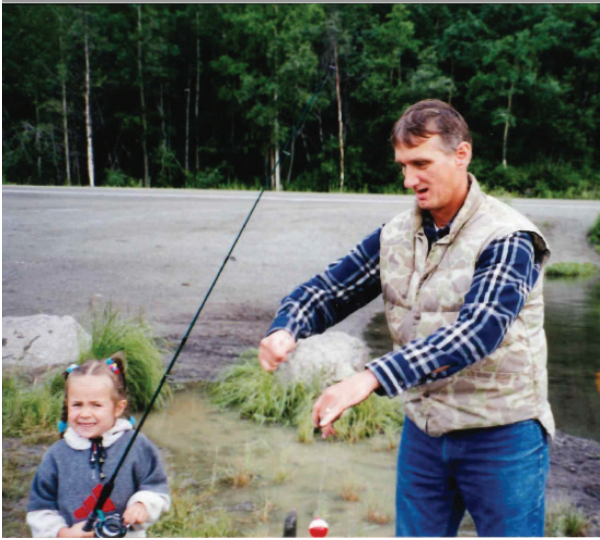
"I had somebody call about a chinchilla the other day," Walton said. "They were like, 'My pet chinchilla died and I want to keep its skull.' I said, 'Well, bring it over.'"

Walton says almost every major museum has a beetle colony since it's the most effective way to clean bone without chemicals. Nasal cavities in animals are typically destroyed with normal taxidermy methods, but the beetles will eat around the intricate part of bone, leaving it fully intact. Cleaning bone by boiling is another alternative, but according to Walton, when the bone gets hot, the joints and plates will get loose and degrade the bone more.

The beetles do their work in a week to a week and a half, but the entire process takes around four months. After the beetles have done their share of the work, Walton will clean the bone, whiten it and epoxy the teeth so they stay in place without chipping.

Even though Walton is working two jobs, he hopes that eventually the Alaska Beetle Farm can be his only occupation.

*Words by Sam Davenport
Photos by Young Kim*



Firsts and lasts in Spenard

My first memory of Spenard, and the United States in general, is riding up and down on the escalators at the Ted Stevens International Airport for what seemed to be hours. The year was 2001, and my family had just moved to the U.S. from Magadan, Russia.

Confused and lost coming to a country I didn't know, I quickly felt at home in the community. I've known Spenard to be home since I was four and a half years old.

Spenard for me has always been a place for firsts, and unfortunately, for lasts. In Spenard, I spoke my first sentence in English, I made my first best friend, I started Kindergarten, and I eventually learned how to drive.

Growing up, my step-dad always took my mom and I to Skipper's Restaurant for dinner. Looking back, I'm not sure why we ever went there or why we went so often; none of us really liked

the food that much.

The place went out of business years ago and was replaced by a leather store. Regardless, it remains a warm memory of greasy fish sticks and light conversation.

In February 2014, I was in my senior year at West High School. On a snowy and icy afternoon, our class had just come in second in Super West Olympics of Pride, or SWOOP for short.

Driving home with far too much excitement and not enough caution, I vastly underestimated the ice-covered curves of Spenard Road and wound up crashing my beloved Nissan Xterra into a light pole across from the Alano Club.

Covered in endlessly falling snow, I remember waiting for my step-dad to come to the scene of the accident while I stared across the street at the club.

When I was a kid, my step-dad managed the Alano Club. I remember going there, happily, during the day and seeing the place in action. After the wreck, he worked diligently to get my car fixed up so I could drive myself to and from school.

I refused to drive on Spenard Road for years, afraid of getting in another accident. A few months later, my step-dad passed away.

His celebration of life was held at the Alano Club, the ultimate location for a man who spent the majority of his life living and giving back to the neighborhood.

As an adult now, I like to think back to the memories I've had in the neighborhood. I like to remember how everything used to be and welcome the changes that are coming. Spenard, to me, has always been welcoming and warm, despite the ups and downs I've experienced within its bounds.

Though my neighbors and childhood friends have mostly moved out of Spenard, I still continue to make it my home, and like the charm of this neighborhood, I'm not going away anytime soon.

*Words and photo courtesy of
Arina Filippenko*



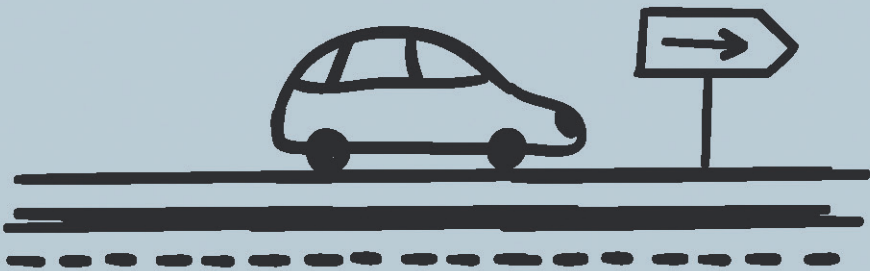
Spenard snapshot

GRAPHICS BY SHAYNE NUESCA

Imagine a neighborhood where the residents come from all walks of life. Many of them are educated and have earned a college degree.

The neighborhood also has some of the lowest housing rates in town. The residents are in their prime working years and 75 percent of them are part of the workforce.

This neighborhood isn't imaginary. It's right around the corner. The neighborhood is Spenard.



DATA COURTESY OF ANCHORAGE COMMUNITY LAND TRUST



More than 1/3

38% African American, Alaska Native, Asian, Pacific Islander or mixed race descent

24%



Spenard residents age 25 years or over with a Bachelor's Degree or higher



35 years old

average age of Spenardians

3/4 residents

part of the workforce

\$1,104

average cost of rent

\$54,057

median household income



PALACE OF RUGS BRINGS THE WORLD TO SPENARD

Tucked in the middle of Fireweed Lane lives Palace of Rugs, owned by Chereyl D'Amour and Seyavash Daryai.

The building's exterior seems somewhat ordinary, but is no match for what's inside. Over 800 rugs line the walls of the space, each one different than the next.

Palace of Rugs in Anchorage opened its doors in June of 1999. Its services go beyond rug sales. The couple offers appraisals, cleaning and repairs to their customers as well.

"You can purchase a rug from many places, but you have to go somewhere else to get the rug cleaned if you end up needing that. Being able to do it all in one spot didn't exist up here," D'Amour said.





Before starting Palace of Rugs in Anchorage, Daryai apprenticed and opened luxury rug stores in Germany, California and Arizona.

D'Amour came from a family that has been in the rug business for four generations, beginning with her great-grandfather who opened a rug store in Chicago, Illinois after immigrating from Lebanon. She took her expertise to Scottsdale, Arizona where she opened up a rug shop.

Daryai, from Iran, learned most of his knowledge about rugs in Germany. In 1987, Daryai came to the U.S. to pursue rug making. It was in Arizona where he met and married D'Amour.

The couple then decided to move to Anchorage on a whim, where they would take a stab at the rug market somewhere a little less traditional.

“We had no one up here, no real reason to come to Anchorage. It was an adventure. No one in our family has been up this far, with this type of business. We just had each other,” D'Amour said.

All of the rugs for sale in their store are handmade from all-natural materials like cotton, wool or silk, and curated from rug makers all over the world. The rugs vary in design and origin, with many of them being purchased from Iran, Pakistan, China, Turkey, India and Russia.

In Munich, Daryai learned to make rugs, but because it takes years to make just one rug, he decided to collect rugs from around the world instead.



When stock is low, Daryai and D'Amour travel to rug markets in the Lower 48, or even to other countries to pick out new rugs to bring home.

"It's a well-connected world with the rug dealers. Being in different states and countries, we are less competitive and more mindful because the business can be hard to stay afloat in," D'Amour said.

Daryai and D'Amour say they have seen a change in the market, and want to appeal to a younger crowd.

"The market varies with luxury items like these. Knowledge about antique items, not just rugs, but art in general, is not put in the minds of youth now because money would rather be put into electronics, and things like that. Items like our rugs, that are made to not be replaced are not sought after as much," D'Amour said.

Palace of Rugs is open at 841 W. 24th, Noon - 5 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

*Words by Madison McEnaney
Photos by Young Kim*



GHOSTS OF SPENARD

ROUTE 33

The building that most recently housed Route 33, was most notably home to the Fly by Night Club. Originally built in the 1950s as a hardware store, Mr. Whitekeys' Fly By Night Club became popular for his "Whale Fat Follies" and "Christmas in Spenard" shows. The club operated for over 26 years and shut its doors in 2006. Player's House of Rock took shop shortly after the closing of the Fly by Night Club, but business fizzled out by 2010, when TapRoot relocated to 3300 Spenard Road. TapRoot closed abruptly in 2017, and reopened weeks later as a new venue called Route 33. Operated by only one of the two original owners of TapRoot, Hans Nowka, the restaurant Route 33 was only open for a matter of months. The Anchorage Daily News reported in Nov. 2017 that the business appeared closed and that the doors had been locked several times during business hours.

PARADISE INN

The building was built in 1962 and was once known as the South Seas Hotel and Lounge. The Paradise Inn became a hot spot for drug dealing and prostitution, according to local police. In a 2002 Anchorage Assembly special meeting, Alicia Knight, who was a former patroller for the Westside Community Patrol said that she had personally seen acts of solicitation of prostitution at the Paradise Inn. Knight also said the general reputation of the Paradise Inn was as a dive. It would eventually be drugs that would close the Paradise Inn for good. After selling a pound of methamphetamine to an undercover FBI agent in 2014, the owner and operator, Kyong Taek Song, was sentenced to over six years in prison. Currently, the property is boarded up and in the hands of the U.S. Marshals Service and FBI.





VACANCY
SPENARD
PARADISE
INN

CHAMPA THAI
Cuisine

ALANO CLUB
JUST FOR TODAY
ONE DAY AT A
TIME
WE DO RECOVER



LA MEX

The restaurant set up shop in a log cabin in 1969 on Mountain View Drive. In 1971, La Mex moved to its Spenard location and shared a building with a dentist office and the Girl Scouts. The Mexican restaurant operated for over 42 years in its Spenard location before shutting down in 2013. The original owner's daughter, Trina Johnson, who had been running the restaurant on her own since 1990, told the Anchorage Daily News that it just wasn't busy anymore. The property was sold to Moreland Properties, the real estate group that is majority owned by the two men who started Moose's Tooth in 1996. The company had no plans set for the property when they purchased it from Johnson, and nearly five years later, the building still remains idle. The parking lot, an area once home to a brothel, is being used as overflow parking for Bear Tooth, just a couple streets over.

*Words by Victoria Petersen
Photos by Zakiya McCummings*



A Spenard haiku

A logging roads winds

And winds down to Lake Spenard

It's red light all night

Words and photo by Victoria Petersen



CULTIVATED BY COMMUNITY: SPENARD'S FIRST NEIGHBORHOOD GARDEN DEBUTS IN MAY



A group of Anchorage women have banded together to build the first community garden in Spenard.

Leading the charge is Michelle Wilber, program manager for the Alaska Community Action on Toxics' Yarcucopia, Alivia DeBusk, a member of the Anchorage Permaculture Guild, board member of Alaska Cold Climate Permaculture Institute, and owner of Adrift Gardens, Julie Leonard, Spenard resident, and Iris Crook, North Star resident who assisted with efforts that began as part of a university senior project.

DeBusk's dream for a community garden bloomed around two years ago.

"Everyone who wants to should have a chance to garden," DeBusk said.

Through mutual contacts, she met Caitlin Taylor, Anchorage Community Land Trust's community development associate.

Taylor was one of ACLT's members who helped the women write grants. ACLT focuses on neighborhood revitalization work in Anchorage's low-income neighborhoods: Mountain View, Fairview and Spenard.

Taylor and the women received a grant from the Mayor's Office called a Local Mini-Food Grant through Cities of Service. Their proposal was accepted for \$877.

"We believe in the neighborhoods that we work in and we want to promote the positive. Gardens and parks are just examples of community development work where you get to empower residents as advocates," Taylor said.

DeBusk is a Spenard resident who teaches a gardening class called the Green Thumb Course at Anchorage Community House, which recently relocated to the Church of Love. The course lasts from March until September and teaches everything you need to know about gardening for beginners.

The garden plot sits behind the Church of Love, which is owned by Cook Inlet Housing Authority. CIHA will be letting the gardeners use the land in a pilot program this summer, as well as donating water to the project. The plot is about 90 by 140 feet in size. Regardless of whether or not the pilot is successful, DeBusk will continue to push for more gardens in the city.

Meg Zaletel, ACH's manager, met DeBusk through the permaculture guild.

"A garden is much more than a space to grow food, it's a communal gathering space, one that can facilitate art and other activities as the community needs," Zaletel said in an email.

The gardeners and ACH have partnered with Lutheran Social Services to donate a portion of the excess produce to them.

DeBusk says that there will be work days twice a week and a permablitz, where members of the community come together and build the garden together on May 19.

"I feel like food is something everybody can get behind. Being out in nature is something most people can get behind," DeBusk said. "While everybody doesn't like gardening and it's not for everyone and that's okay, there are enough people in this world who want to, and we should give them those opportunities to do it."

Words by Sam Davenport



Illustration by Taylor Thompson

JESSICA'S CHEESY CRACKER-CRUSTED HALIBUT



COMMUNITY COOKBOOK

Jessica Stugelmayer is a fellow Spenardian and foodie. She is Edible Alaska's senior digital content editor and the director of marketing and promotions for Alaska Public Media. Stugelmayer previously worked as the web editor for KTVA 11 News where she co-created a web series called "Harvesting Alaska," which earned a James Beard Foundation award for Best Television Segment in 2017. The James Beard Award is the most prestigious food journalism award you can earn. Stugelmayer says it's the equivalent of the Oscars for food.

Stugelmayer's recipe is a mashup of Lidia Bastianich's Gloucester baked halibut and Julia O'Malley's cousin Tanya's salmon.

"What I really love about this recipe is that you can basically use any cracker and any cheese," Stugelmayer said. "Taste them together to make sure that they work."

She recommends a sharp white cheddar with saltines and more nutty, seedy crackers with a gouda cheese.



INGREDIENTS

- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup crackers, like multi-seed or saltines
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh or dried herbs like thyme, oregano or parsley
- 1 1/2 cups grated cheese, like white cheddar or gouda
- 4 skinless halibut fillets, roughly the same size and shape to ensure even cooking
- Salt to taste
- 2 cloves garlic, optional

DIRECTIONS

(Optional) Slice garlic and place in a measuring cup with the olive oil and let infuse for 30 minutes or more. Leave the garlic in the cup when using oil later.

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Crush crackers in a large zip-top bag. In a rimmed dish, combine crackers, herbs and half of the olive oil and toss to coat. Add more oil if needed. Add the grated cheese and mix well.
3. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or foil. If there's oil left in the cup, use it to grease the paper or foil.
4. Working with one fillet at a time, coat the fish on all sides with the crumbs, pressing firmly to get a thick coating. Place the fish on the baking sheet, leaving space in between.
5. Bake until crumb coating is crisp and golden and fish is cooked through, about 15-20 minutes depending on the thickness of the fish.

FIVE PLACES TO GET A QUICK BITE TO EAT IN SPENARD

There are dozens of cafes, restaurants, eateries and mom-and-pop shops in Spenard that provide Spenardians with a hearty meal. Here are just five of the many places to spend your lunch break for a reasonable price.

*Words by Victoria Petersen and Sam Davenport
Photo by Young Kim*

YAK AND YETI CAFE

1360 W Northern Lights Boulevard

A branch of the popular Himalayan restaurant a few blocks down the road, Yak and Yeti Cafe offers to-go versions of classic Indian, Nepalese and Tibetan dishes. Options include sandwiches, soups, gyros, rice bowls and specialty drinks. Rice bowls include a bowl of rice with a choice of two or three entree options such as beef curry, chicken tikka masala, pork vindaloo and more for under \$10.

Yak and Yeti Cafe is open 10 a.m. – 8 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays, 10 a.m. – 9 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays and 11 a.m. – 7 p.m. on Sundays.

OUT OF THE BOX

3807 Spenard Road

This gluten-free restaurant provides a healthy alternative to some with a gluten intolerance, but still has carb-filled meals for patrons who love their bread. Their rotating menu consists of chicken fried steak, poutine, beef stroganoff and fish and chips. The casual restaurant also includes vegetarian and vegan options on their menu. Gluten-free cupcakes and other sweet treats are the cherry on top at this health-conscious eatery.

Out of the Box is open 11:30 a.m. – 8 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. They are closed Sundays and Mondays.

TOMMY'S BURGER STOP

1106 W 29th Place

Need a hearty burger with a hefty side of fries? Look no further. Tommy's Burger Stop has been living in the heart of Spenard since 2002 and is here to satisfy your cravings. Business Insider, Huffington Post and Thrillist named Tommy's the best place to get a burger in the state of Alaska. Their infamous R.L.E. Hello Burger consists of two 5.5 ounce patties loaded with bacon, grilled mushrooms, onion and jalapeno peppers, topped with American cheese for \$13.75. If burgers aren't your style, Tommy's sells Po Boys, Philly cheese steaks and salads.

Tommy's Burger Stop is open 10:30 a.m. – 9 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, 11 a.m. – 9 p.m. Saturdays and 12 – 6 p.m. Sundays.

TOP BOP

3020 Minnesota Drive #20

The westside location of Top Bop gives visitors a quick grab-and-go meal for those in a rush, but who still want a tasty meal. If you're in a pinch, Top Bop delivers. The fusion restaurant offers an array of Korean, Japanese and Chinese dishes that come in a to-go bowl over rice and vegetables. Bowls come in two sizes, regular and large, that range from \$9.99-\$12.98. Dumplings, shrimp tempura, kimchi, seaweed salad, macaroni salad and miso soup can be added as a side to any meal.

Top Bop is open 11 a.m. – 9 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays and is closed Sundays.

PHO LENA

3311 Spenard Road

Pho Lena's Spenard location is a well-priced restaurant that serves substantial portions of pad thai, pad ka pow, yellow curry or whatever your taste buds desire. Their portions are large and give you leftovers to take to work the next day. As the name suggests, pho is offered along with other menu items inspired by Thai, Laotian, Vietnamese, Chinese and other Asian cuisines.

Pho Lena is open 11 a.m. – 10 p.m. Mondays through Fridays, 12 – 10 p.m. on Saturdays and 3 – 10 p.m. on Sundays.



PORK VINDALOO,
PORK VINDALOO
SANDWICH AND
PITA BREAD FROM
YAK AND YETI CAFE



OPEN FOR BUSINESS IN SPENARD: HOW A ROAD PROJECT CATALYZED A NEIGHBORHOOD MOVEMENT

It was Dungeons and Dragons night at Bosco's and the parking lot was packed. Inside the big, brightly lit comic store, customers browsed aisles filled with books and games, and the back room buzzed with activity as players gathered around half a dozen tables.

A lot has changed since the popular Spenard comic shop first went into business more than 30 years ago, said Bosco's owner John Weddleton. Not just new games and comics. There was a time, years ago, when the shop hired a security guard to protect the parking lot from pimps and dealers, he said. Eventually the recession ended and so did the fights outside the store. Now, he said, "It's a thousand times better."

It didn't happen by accident.

"The way the world works, I've learned over the years, the system works better with groups," Weddleton said, sitting in a front room at his busy shop one March evening.

Enter the Spenard Chamber of Commerce, one of the few neighborhood business associations in Anchorage. Co-founded in 2011 by Weddleton, now an Anchorage Assemblyman, and longtime Spenard resident Mark Butler, who also co-founded the neighborhood farmers' market, the chamber aims "to cultivate Spenard's status as Anchorage's vibrant shopping, dining and entertainment district with an abundant variety of successful independent businesses in a safe and fun environment," according to its mission.

“Our goal was to advocate for the businesses of Spenard,” Butler said.

There are plenty for which to advocate. Butler calls the neighborhood the muscle-powered sports capital of Alaska for its plentiful outdoor equipment retailers, yoga studios and sport shops. Then there are the bars and eateries, consignment shops, salons, art studios, markets and miscellaneous other stores. At last count, Spenard was home to more than 500 independent local businesses, Butler said, not to mention the fast-food restaurants and larger chains.

Today, approximately 150 of those neighborhood businesses belong to the Spenard Chamber of Commerce, Butler said. Filled with builders, bikers, printers, poets, florists, artists, developers and retailers, the chamber’s Board of Directors has been as eclectic as the neighborhood itself.

The group first convened seven years ago in support of a major reconstruction project at the north end of Spenard Road between Hillcrest Drive and Benson Boulevard. Wider sidewalks and bike paths would help turn the whole area into a more walkable shopping district, Butler said. He thought it would be good for business. Walking from one end of Spenard Road to another, knocking on doors, they found other neighbors agreed. The newly formed Spenard Chamber of Commerce made it official.

“I think it gave us a bigger voice — a unified voice that wanted progress; that wanted improvements,” said Barb Smart, owner of Alaska Leather and chair of the Spenard Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors since its inception.

Business has evolved since the motorcycle parts and accessories store first opened in 1979, Smart said. Box stores came to town and e-commerce changed the whole game. An upgraded commercial corridor could help attract more customers to brick-and-mortar businesses throughout the neighborhood, she said.

“Walkability is a huge thing,” she said.

After a full construction season in 2017, the bond-funded renovation at the north end of Spe-

nard Road is now in its final stages, according to the Municipality of Anchorage Project Management and Engineering Department.

Longtime businesses and residents hope new private investment will follow.

“I think when it looks better, more people will come here, people will start fixing their buildings,” Weddleton said.

Besides the road project, the chamber has advocated for the redevelopment of neglected and derelict property throughout Spenard, from the old National Guard Armory formerly at the intersection of Spenard and International Airport Road to the site of the old gas station at Spenard and 36th Avenue. Today one site is valet-serviced car park; the other is a mixed-use residential and retail development. The Spenard Corridor Plan is another priority, according to the chamber.

At the end of the day, more business is good for everyone in the neighborhood, Butler said. That’s what the Spenard Chamber of Commerce hopes to encourage.

Butler points to expansion by existing business and new shops popping up along the length of Spenard Road in recent years, from Hulin Alaska Design to Enlighten Alaska to Bambino’s Baby Food and others.

“To me, the true test is where the entrepreneurs are: are they investing or are they fleeing?” Butler said.

In Spenard, he said, the answer speaks for itself.

*Words by Kirsten Swann
Photo by Young Kim*



Faces of Spenard: David

I inherited my taste for good wine and my love for photography from my grandfather, David Butcher. I was also lucky enough to inherit his stories and his history.

Over a year and a half ago I moved in with my grandparents, into the house he built, next to my great-grandparents' homestead and into the neighborhood I had lived in-and-out of for so many years.

My grandpa passed away from cancer in October of 2017. He was a kind and funny grandpa. Every time I came upstairs to say hi, he always looked genuinely excited to see me. I'll always be thankful for the time I was able to spend with him, especially while living here. I'd like to remember and honor him in the best way I know how, by sharing his story.

I was enchanted with stories from my grandpa's past. He told me about Anchorage's wild history, about when West High was two-stories tall and all about the origin of my beloved neighborhood, Spenard.

My grandpa came to Alaska when he was a small boy in the early 1940s. Accompanied by his mom, Hazel Butcher, and his brother, Dar-

win, he arrived in Alaska by steamship from Washington. Dropping them off in Seward, they took the train to Anchorage.

It was a memorable ride, to say the least. The railroad was being operated by the military during World War II, and the soldiers were mad they had to miss Christmas. The engineers decided to get drunk and accelerate the speed of the train, only to bring it to a screeching halt. This went on until the crew finally passed out at Kenai Lake, a lake my great-grandparents would eventually build their summer cabin on.

Fights broke out and the train cars were in chaos, as my great-grandma would later describe the scene. A man who claimed to have experience operating locomotives walked around with a petition that would allow him to control the train. My great-grandma signed it and they eventually made their way to Anchorage.

It was nearly midnight on Christmas day when they finally arrived in Anchorage. A woman was supposed to meet them to help the family find housing, but she never showed up. Taking her small children, Hazel Butcher slept in the lobby of a nearby hotel. When she tried to reach her husband, Harold Butcher in Juneau, she was disappointed to find out that phone access to Juneau from Anchorage was not set up. Harold Butcher was in Juneau with their youngest child, Paula, taking the BAR exam. The family eventually found each other in Anchorage.

As the family settled into Anchorage, my grandpa was baptized into the Mormon Church at Lake Spenard. What most recognize today as the largest seaplane base in the world, Lake Spenard was quiet and serene when my grandpa was an 8-year-old.

The family bought a car and drove it up to Alaska. Harold Butcher, who was a purchasing agent for the highway, at the time, got special permission to drive the ALCAN in the summer of 1945, three years before the road was open to the public. That was the first of over 22 times my grandpa got to travel the ALCAN.

Grandpa drove the highway many times with his wife, Sylvia Butcher, typically in a Volkswagen bug or bus. The first time my grandma saw Alaska was in 1962, driving the highway with grandpa in a Volkswagen bug. The couple endured six bridge washouts. They had to drive north and through Dawson City where they were forced to ferry their car across the Yukon River on a makeshift log raft. Their Alaska adventure didn't stop there.

Grandma and grandpa lived on W. 25th Avenue when the world shook around them. It was 5:36 p.m., Good Friday, 1964 when my grandparents finished off their dinner of burgers and steak fries, with coffee. The 9.2 magnitude earthquake shook the basement apartment, tossing their wedding china to the floor and shifting the door frame. The two ran outside and eventually made it down the street to grandpa's parent's house, where they found great-grandma cooking dinner, holding the cabinets shut as the earth shook for nearly five minutes.

Grandpa attended Anchorage High School and was one of the first graduating classes to graduate in the brand new building in 1955. The school was built on Romig Hill and technically wasn't a part of Anchorage, but was part of Spenard, a town all its own at the time. Eventually, the name of the high school was changed to West Anchorage High School, where my mom, Stacy Butcher, and then later I would graduate.

Later, in the 1980s, my grandpa was given some land near his parents' homestead. He built his home, that still stands here today.

This house is where my parents were married, I learned how to read and so many other events took place. Luckily, my grandpa was able to spend the rest of his life in his house.

David was born Sept. 9, 1937 and passed away Oct. 24, 2017.

Words by Victoria Petersen

GRANNY B'S COMMEMORATES A GRANDMOTHER'S LEGACY



For 16 years, I have lived two blocks away from Granny B's Café wondering what it had to offer. When I was 9 years old, I would spend my money on ice cream and walk up the hill to buy candy at Mexico Lindo. The parking lot tempted me with the smell of freshly made biscuits, and I'd stare at Granny B's, not knowing if it was worth going inside.

I stepped foot in the quaint café for the first time with a warm greeting from the waiter, and the savory smell of their famous biscuits.

I sat down and ordered the biscuits and gravy. One bite was all it took to bring me back into my childhood and fulfill that desire to try the soft and buttery goodness of those biscuits.

In 2002, Granny B's Café opened its doors to Spenard. The cafe is owned and operated by John Gaskin, Granny B's grandson.

The menu acknowledges everyone in their family by naming the main dishes after them. TJ's cheesy omelet was named after Gaskin's nephew and Buddy's BLT was named after his step-brother.

"[Granny B] taught my mom how to cook. My mom taught me how to cook... It's fun. I've been doing this for 31 straight years. I still enjoy it," Gaskin said.

Beatrice King, famously known as "Granny B," had moved from the Lower 48 with her family in the mid-1970s following the work up north. King's family moved to Fairbanks, and her son opened the first Kentucky Fried Chicken in town before moving to Anchorage.

Passed down by King's son, the infamous biscuit recipe still holds itself on the board of favorites at Granny B's Cafe.

Before there was Granny B's Café, Blondie's Café was owned by King and opened on Fourth Avenue until she passed away in 1999.

"That was the first restaurant. We had that for 17 years. That was at the start of the Iditarod. You can tell that we have stuff everywhere here from those times," Gaskin said.

Granny B's Café was established to commemorate her legacy and to continue with the family business.

Natalie Snyder, Gaskin's sister and King's granddaughter, likes to stop by every weekend to help out and see how the restaurant is doing.

"My grandmother was a little celebrity at Blondie's Café. She was a personality that was always around. She went by 'B.' Everyone called her Granny B. She was one of those people who loved everyone no matter what... She just really wanted to know people. She has one of the biggest hearts you could ever imagine. She was my best friend," Snyder said.

Gaskin has regulars who keep the business running by coming in four to five times a day. Not only does Gaskin like to acknowledge their customers by learning their names and orders, they give out cookies to children who stop by after school for a snack.

"There's a school across the street... and we gave away free cookies to all the kids for 14 years. There's one little kid who's now older and works at the bank now. He said, 'Do you remember me? I used to come in here to get cookies all the time.' Time flies, and it makes me feel old," Gaskin said.

King's family members have always considered Spenard their home. King herself lived on Penquin Court until she passed away. Granny B's continues to keep her legacy alive and well.

Granny B's Café is cash only. The café is located on 1201 W. Tudor Road and open 7 a.m. - 3 p.m., Wednesday to Saturday, and 8 a.m. - 3 p.m. on Sunday.

*Words by Mizelle Mayo
Photo by Young Kim*



Back in my day...

The house I live in today was built by an original Spenardian, Andrew Bandy Sr. The very logs were taken from trees in the surrounding area of the Lincoln Park subdivision and completely made by hand in 1949. It is the only house in the area still on well water, located at 1801 McKinley Ave. While the neighborhood has grown into a suburb, this house stands as a testament to Bandy's Alaskan pioneering spirit.

Words and photo courtesy of Jacob Thompson

Thanks for reading.

Want to get involved? Email us at
thespenardian@gmail.com for more information.



